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SUBJECT: HARDLINE MESSAGE STILL PUSHED BY BASHIR

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During the past week the Government of Sudan appeared to continue to move to the right. President Bashir spoke in strident tones about the UN, and compared fighting an international peacekeeping force to Hezbollah's conflict with Israel, senior regime officials traveled to the North in an apparent effort to firm up the NCP's base of support, and rumors circulated of a reshuffle of certain senior government figures to empower the regime hardliners. End summary.

Officials' Comments and Editorials More Strident

¶2. (SBU) Statements in the past week by President Omer Hassan al-Bashir and other National Congress Party leaders have lauded the outcome of fighting in Israel and Palestine. Bashir has gone further in recent days by pledging to fight the UN like Hezbollah fought the Israelis. His comparison is a continuation of his rhetoric against UN involvement in Darfur, and appears calculated to build ideological and emotional support in advance of an anticipated offensive in Darfur and to counter international pressure which may result.

¶3. (SBU) The inflammatory remarks have been reported extensively in the Arabic and English-language press, and have been repeated in editorials (covered septel). Bashir commended "the steadfastness of Hezbollah under the leadership of Nasrallah" and hailed the struggle of the Palestinian peoples, affirming Sudan's solidarity with Lebanon and Palestine. A senior NCP member praised the "stance of Hezbollah in the face of the Zionist enemy and the victory achieved in Lebanon after the Israeli aggression against it."

¶4. (SBU) Simultaneous statements by regime officials, including Vice President Ali Osman Taha, and reports published in SUNA, the national press organ, continued to refer to the proposed UN role in Darfur in conspiratorial terms. SUNA claimed comments by Jan Pronk on the increase of violence in Darfur in the past year were timed specifically to weaken the Sudanese Government stance against a UN force in Darfur, and to enable the UN to "send a huge military force in Darfur prior to occupying Sudan."

High Level Visits to the North

¶5. (SBU) The analogy with Hezbollah was a recurring theme as leaders headed north. Vice President Taha visited Northern State August 14-15. President Bashir will visit River Nile State on August 17. These visits can be seen as an effort to shore up support for the NCP in the party's base in the North. The visits reassure the northerners that they are the center of attention and play on the theme that "outsiders are against us," but that Sudan would prevail.

¶6. (SBU) In addition, the Minister of Energy and Mining Dr. Awad Ahmad al-Jaz visited the North on August 16 and met with leaders there, reaffirming that peace in the East had been nearly finalized. Interestingly, while in the North, he "announced the discovery of

oil reserves in bloc 14 in Wadi Halfa (northern Sudan) and affirmed that the area is rich in gold and other mineral resources." His statements have no basis in reality, but can be seen as a comment that the North has its own resources and does not need outsiders. (Comment: In fact, Wadi Halfa is not in block 14, there has been no oil exploration at Wadi Halfa and geologically it is unlikely oil will be found in the area. End comment.)

Government Reshuffle?

17. (SBU) Alwan ran a short story recently asserting that there will be a reshuffling of government positions to accommodate SLM leader and now Senior Assistant to the President Minni Arkoi Minawi. Concurrently, there are rumors circulating on what changes will be made. Notably, it is rumored that National Intelligence and Security Services Director Salah Gosh will be replaced; either by current Minister of Interior Zubeir Bashir Taha, or State Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Ahmed Karti. Both Taha and Karti are NCP hardliners, who helped to create the Popular Defense Forces (PDF).

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